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SUBJECT: OPPOSITION LEADER OUATTARA STILL DOUBTS GBAGBO'S COMMITMENT TO ELECTIONS; SEES POTENTIAL FOR UNREST

Classified By: POLCOUNS S. EIRIZ FOR REASONS 1.4 (b/d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In a December 20, conversation with Ambassador, RDR par leader Ouattara expressed concern about ongoing delays in the deployment audiences foraines teams, the lack of precision about the identification process and the role of technical operator SAGEM. The RDR will be preparing a presidential election in June 2008, but Ouattara doubted that Gbagbo live up to this commitment. Ouattara was worried about the potential for should elections be postponed yet again. Ouattara had just returned from Ouagadougou where he said he pressed OPA Facilitator Compaore to give d'Ivoire's political parties a more prominent role in OPA negotiations. In previous meetings, Ouattara called on the international community to assure that Gbagbo's lives up to his promises. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Ambassador Nesbitt and PolCouns called on Rally of Republicans (Rassemblement des Republicains - RDR) leader and former Prime Minister Alassane Dramane Ouattara on December 20 to discuss the Ouagadougou Pol Agreement (OPA). Ambassador commented on the marked drop in public disapproval about the audiences foraines process (tribunals that will issue birth certificates to persons whose births were never registered), and political parties' apparent shift of focus to elections. She also told Ouattara that U.S. message to the government has been and will continue to be that elections are necessary but they must be transparent.

Identification

¶3. (C) Ouattara said the RDR remains very concerned about delays in the audiences foraines process, noting that 30 additional teams the Ministry of Justice promised December 11, to deploy soon were still not in the field. The audiences foraines process is the first step in the identification process for those who have no birth certificate, the lack of progress is especially disappointing. Ouattara calculated that Cote d'Ivoire's electoral list probably comprise about 8.5 million people (approximately 50% of the population, not counting a couple of million foreigners). He estimated there are probably 2 million Ivoirians who have some documentation but who are old enough or didn't qualify to vote in 2000 and are not on the 2000 electoral list. (Ouattara said that the voting age was lowered from 21 to 18 in 2000; many young people were not able to register in time to be on the list. Another 1 million probably have no documents at all. Ouattara's concern was whether there would be sufficient time between now and June 2008, for SAGEM to document all potential voters given that a decree specifying SAGEM's role has not yet been issued. Ouattara said a decree laying out SAGEM's duties is currently being drafted and that the Prime Minister hopes to reach consensus with all the political parties regarding SAGEM's role before the decree is issued. Ouattara stressed that the identification process cannot begin until SAGEM's role is agreed upon.

Elections

¶4. (C) Ouattara told the Ambassador that the RDR will be ready for elections in June 2008 and will accept the outcome of a fair contest. Ouattara doubted, however, that President Gbagbo would ultimately allow an election to take place; Ouattara said Gbagbo knows he cannot win a transparent vote. Ou

said that Gbagbo refused to hold elections one year ago despite Ouattara having told him that the RDR would accept him as President if he won in and fair elections. The Ambassador pointed out that many observers believe the situation has changed and that Gbagbo now calculates that he can, indeed, win a fair election. In response, Ouattara described Gbagbo as an actor and manipulator, but reiterated that he will recognize a Gbagbo victory as elections are transparent. Ambassador noted that Gbagbo had met just the previous day with the Independent Electoral Commission and wondered if significant. Ouattara said that his information indicated that Commission members had avoided any substantive discussion of electoral modalities with Gbagbo in order to ensure their independence.

Possibility of Unrest

15. (C) Ouattara said he was concerned that there could be unrest in the months if Ivoirians fail to see progress on implementation of the OPA and the economic situation declines. He said that if it became clear that Gbagbo did not intend to hold elections, he could envision the armed forces losing patience with the political leaders' ability to manage the situation and resorting to a coup d'etat to bring the country to elections.

Role of International Community

16. (C) Throughout the conversation Ouattara called on the international community to exert more pressure on Gbagbo, perhaps even adopting sanctions to ensure that he implements the OPA. Ouattara said Prime Minister Soro has the power but ultimately not the power to move the process forward; Gbagbo has the power and creates obstacles to block progress when he chooses. Ouattara told the Ambassador that he has asked OPA Facilitator President Blaise Compaore of Burkina Faso to give the opposition political parties a more active role in the implementation. Ouattara said he argued that excluding the political opposition was acceptable when the OPA's primary focus was reunifying the country.

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addressing the existence of two competing armies. But the OPA had become predominantly a political question and the major political parties should be at the negotiating table. According to Ouattara, Compaore agreed that the Consultation Framework, which includes Ouattara and the Democratic Party of Ivory Coast (Parti Democratique de la Cote d'Ivoire -PDCI) leader and former President Henri Konan Bedie, will meet more frequently. The next meeting will occur on January 24.

17. (C) Comment: Ouattara's comments to the Ambassador echoed his November conversation with Deputy Secretary of State Negroponte. Emboldened by success at the degree to which his comments and presentation did not appear to take into account recent developments. His longstanding view of Gbagbo as an untrustworthy opponent clearly colors his view of the President's actions. It is true that the OPA sidelined the opposition, but Ouattara has also failed to use his position as opposition leader to push the audiences for reforms and identification issues more forcefully. Instead, he seems to be counting on Compaore to give him a larger role in the negotiation process.

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